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ABSTRACT

An analysis is presented of the current status of changes in teacher training in Northern Ireland. The rapid expansion of schooling during the 1950s and 1960s resulted in an expansion of schools of education. Three of the six teacher education institutions providing courses of initial education and training for teachers are recognized colleges of the Queen's University. The introduction of concurrent undergraduate degree programs in 1968 brought all colleges into closer association with Queen's University, but not quite into the mainstream of higher education. The Lelievre Report (1972) confirmed this association. However, the report miscalculated demographic trends and the demand for new teachers. Subsequently, demand for teachers has fallen markedly, and the resulting contraction in the size of the teacher education system has created major problems. Four issues have emerged and are under study by the government Department of Education: (1) demand for teachers from different types of schools, including voluntarily maintained (Roman Catholic) schools, and controlled (Protestant) schools; (2) possible changes in the system's structure and the relationship among different types of institutions; (3) certification of teachers; and (4) structure and content of teacher education courses. (JD)

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Teacher Education in Northern Ireland

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Paper presented at the World Assembly of the International Council for Education on Teaching (30th, Washington, DC, July 11-15, 1983).

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Teacher Education in Northern Ireland

John F Fulton

Teacher education and training in Northern Ireland has been the subject of almost continuous discussion for the last ten years. One of the main reasons was the realisation in the mid 1970's that the decrease in the number of children in schools, which has profound consequences for teacher education in the rest of the United Kingdom and in most of Europe, was going to be repeated in Northern Ireland. This realisation came somewhat unexpectedly. In 1971 a committee of enquiry, the Lelievre Committee (Ministry of Education N.I., 1973), was appointed to consider the education of teachers in Northern Ireland. In its report published in 1973, the Committee concluded, after an examination of the factors influencing the likely demand for new teachers over the succeeding twenty years or so, that "We cannot estimate with precision our future requirement of teachers nor the rate at which it will increase, but for a variety of reasons.....we are convinced that our provision must be a growing one. It is against this background that we make our proposals for an organisational structure" (para 7.14). As shall be seen presently, this prediction was based on information which proved inaccurate and required hasty revision.

Institutions and courses

There are six institutions in Northern Ireland providing courses of initial education and training for teachers. These are:

1. The Queen's University of Belfast
2. Stranmillis College
3. St Mary's College of Education
4. St Joseph's College of Education
5. The New University of Ulster
6. The Ulster Polytechnic

The three general colleges of education are situated in Belfast. Stranmillis College is a state non-denominational college managed by a governing body on behalf of the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI). It is wholly financed by the Government. St Mary's College of Education for women students and St Joseph's College of Education for men students are owned by the Roman Catholic Church. The running costs of these two colleges are met in full by the Government which also makes grants of 85% of any approved capital expenditure. The three are recognised colleges of Queen's University and both the initial training courses given in the colleges lead to awards of the University. Since the phasing out of the three year certificate courses, there are two pre-service qualifications available in the colleges:

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(i) Bachelor of Education (BEd) which may be taken at either general (3 year) or honours (4 year) level.

(ii) Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), a one year course of professional training for graduates.

The Department of Education in Queen's University also provides a one year PGCE course as well as courses for a masters degree (MEd), research programmes leading to the award of MA(Ed) and PhD degrees, and a range of advanced diplomas. In addition the colleges offer a University validated in-service BEd and a number of certificates for serving teachers.

The New University of Ulster offers four programmes of study leading to a degree and including a professional qualification to teach. Three are at honours level and one at pass degree level and all are based on the study of Education or a joint course of study in Education and another subject. NUU also offers a range of in-service awards leading to higher degrees and advanced diplomas. The Ulster Polytechnic which is to merge with NUU in 1984 provides four year degree courses with a teaching qualification in two curriculum areas, viz. sports studies and home economics, a two year diploma course in craft design and technology and one year post graduate courses in education for those qualified in Art and Music. The Polytechnic also offers a range of courses for serving teachers and in addition provides training for students intending to teach in institutions of further education.

Number of teacher training places

In an analysis of teacher education in Northern Ireland one of the most important features to be taken into account is the relatively small size of the system. Consequently, even small variations in the number of pupils in schools or in the number predicted to be in schools will point to differences in the number of new teachers required, which although small in themselves, may well be large in proportion to the size of the system as a whole.

Initial training intakes

Numbers of students (percentages of totals in brackets)

	1974	1978	1982	1983
Queen's University	171(9.1)	90(11.1)	95(17.6)	90(14.8)
Colleges of Education	811(43.0)	440(54.3)	280(51.8)	390(63.9)
New Univ of Ulster	177(9.4)	150(17.8)	95(17.6)	70(11.5)
Ulster Polytechnic	151(8.0)	130(16.1)	70(13.0)	60(9.8)

It can be seen from Table I that, in 1974, the total intake to the six Northern Ireland institutions offering initial teacher education courses (3 colleges of education, two universities and a polytechnic) was 1310. In addition 575 students preparing for teaching went to colleges and universities in Britain (so-called "free trade" places). Within four years the number entering the Northern Ireland institutions had fallen to 810, a decrease of about 40%, and free trade had been discontinued. Since 1978, no student has received a grant to take a course of initial teacher training in Britain except where no suitable course was available in the province. The numbers continued to fall and in 1981 and 1982, the annual intake to the institutions was 540. The admissions quota for 1983 has been fixed at 610 (DENI, 1982) and recent government statements have indicated that a slow expansion can be expected with annual intakes of between 800 and 900 students in the early and mid 1990's.

The scale and the rapidity of the contraction in the size of the teacher education system in Northern Ireland give some idea of the difficulties with which the institutions had to cope in the last few years. In common with the rest of the United Kingdom, the problems associated with the sustained expansion of the 1950's and 1960's were replaced, from the mid 1970's, by the challenges of contraction. So pressing did these become that the Higher Education Review Group, established under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Chilver in 1978 "to consider the present provision of higher education in Northern Ireland, to review both the general and particular needs of the Northern Ireland community in the 1980's and 1990's for higher education (including advanced further education) and to make recommendations" was asked by the Minister with responsibility for Education in Northern Ireland to examine the future structure of teacher education as a matter of urgency and to provide an interim report. In the three years since that report was published (DENI, 1980) there has been a long and sometimes acrimonious debate about the future of teacher training in the province. The public debate has been mainly at the level of organisational structures dealing with such questions as the number of institutions required, the relationships between them and the most effective method for deploying and co-ordinating the available resources. Although some of these problems have been addressed and solutions agreed, it appears likely that the structure of the teacher education system and related issues will be one of the major issues dominating teacher education in Northern Ireland for the rest of this century. Two other issues are currently under active discussion, the certification of teachers and changes in the structure and content of courses. These three themes are explored in the remainder of this paper.

1. Institutional structures

Historically one can distinguish at least three phases in the arrangements made for training teachers in the United Kingdom and the institutions in which that training took place. The first was the "apprentice-type" system of monitors or pupil teachers, the second the monotechnic training college, and the third, the higher education institution (university, polytechnic and college of education). This is a crude classification, not only because significant overlaps exist between one phase and the next but also because one finds major variations in each category. It can be seen that over the years teacher education moved more into the mainstream of higher education, a progression which reflected to some extent the growing importance of the universities to teacher education and to the teaching profession. From the turn of the century an increasing number of universities established departments of education mainly to prepare graduates to teach in secondary schools. In addition, universities began to play an important role in association with the colleges in what was seen to the latter's major task, the training of teachers for primary schools.

The university connection is not therefore of recent origin; it has been a major and recurring theme in teacher education in the United Kingdom since the late 19th century. These developments took place later in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales. Although there were, since the 1920's, strong informal links between Queen's University and the general colleges of education in BElfast, Stranmillis, St Mary's and St Joseph's, it was not until after the Lockwood Committee (Government of N.I., 1965) reported, that comprehensive formal links were established and the colleges became recognised colleges of the University. By 1979 when the Chilver Review Group began its examination of teacher education, Queen's and its three recognised colleges of education formed an identifiable element in the provision of teacher education, an element referred to by the Lelievre Committee as the Belfast complex.

With the addition of NUU and the Polytechnic each of which provided a location for initial teacher education and training from its establishment in the 1960's, there was no difficulty in supplying the increased demand for teachers which continued into the 1970's. However since the number required started to decrease rapidly, it has become recognised more and more widely that the existence of six institutions all offering courses of initial and in-service training was neither educationally nor economically desirable and the Chilver Review Group made recommendations for effecting a rationalisation of the system. Their analysis of the situation, which I found convincing, led them "to the conclusion that all three colleges (of education) and the QUB teacher education provision should be amalgamated". However there was an "insuperable problem" standing in the way of such a solution, namely that, in bringing the work and

the colleges into a single institution, it "would not be possible to retain a voluntary and denominational element" (para 8.26). Because of the almost complete separation in the school system between controlled (i.e, Protestant) schools and voluntary maintained (i.e., Roman Catholic) schools, an adequate supply of teachers for each sector of the school system could not be ensured under this arrangement.

The solution recommended by the Chilver Review Group was to bring the three colleges of education and the QUB Faculty of Education on to one site, each unit retaining its individual ethos, methods of appointment and admission procedures. This proposal, which would have afforded many opportunities for co-ordination has been described as contrived and many considered it unworkable. However that may be, it proved highly controversial and was abandoned in subsequent discussions in favour of a strategy in which the Catholic voluntary colleges, St Mary's and St Joseph's would merge. Taken together with the later decision by the Government to merge NUU and the Ulster Polytechnic into a new university, the number of institutions offering teacher training institutions will by 1984 be reduced to four, two universities and two colleges.

The current over-supply of teachers has clear implications for the profession. The severely restricted job prospects, the threat of redundancy, the reduction of wastage and the resulting constraints on promotion have not only contributed to a significant lowering of morale but have lessened the attractiveness of teaching both to well-qualified school leavers and also to those of more mature years who might have made a major contribution to teaching. Some commentators argue that recruitment of high quality students can best be ensured by allowing students to delay final commitment to teaching until some time after entry to higher education. Such a development would reinforce the case for a teacher education system based on multitechnic institutions, which would be able to respond quickly and flexibly to changes in the schools and thus facilitate more rational planning of intakes.

However a number of factors militate against the development of such a system. The diversification of the work of the colleges into other areas of higher education, the strategy adopted in England and Wales, would have created more places in higher education when fewer were needed. Consequently this option was not available to the Chilver Working Party. The colleges of education, which are necessary to regulate the supply of teachers to each of the two sectors of the system, the controlled (i.e., Protestant) and maintained (i.e., Roman Catholic) have to remain monotechnics. This means that the majority of students in Northern Ireland preparing for the teaching profession will for the foreseeable future be trained in monotechnic institutions. In 1982, the percentage was 51.8%, in 1983 63.9% (Table I). This latter figure, the

highest for many years was a response by the Government to a demand by the authorities of St Mary's and St Joseph's Colleges for 40%. The authorities of the voluntary colleges argued that, since 50% of the pupils in schools in the province were in Roman Catholic schools, at least 40% (i.e., 80% of the Catholic teachers) should be trained in the two colleges (House of Commons, 1983, para 3.6 et seq).

Although no educational institution receiving grant aid from public funds is permitted to apply a religious criterion for entry, the reality is that only Roman Catholics apply for entry to courses of initial education and training in St Mary's and St Joseph's Colleges. Almost all applicants to similar courses in Stranmillis College are Protestants. On the other hand, it is thought that the two universities and the polytechnic recruit from both communities in almost equal proportions. Therefore the only way to ensure the supply of teachers to both controlled (i.e., Protestant) schools and maintained (i.e., Catholic) schools is to have about the same percentage of the total intake trained in Stranmillis and in St Mary's and St Joseph's together. It is hardly surprising that the Protestant Churches also made a claim for 40% of the intake to be allocated to Stranmillis College.

Both claims have been resisted by the Government although the higher percentage in 1983 (63.9%) appears to have been a concession to the demands which were made. There are many who argue that this figure should not be increased further and adduce at least two reasons to support that point of view. The first is the effect that the consequential cuts in their intakes would have on the teacher training provision in the two universities and the polytechnic. The second is that a substantially fewer number of student teachers in Northern Ireland would be educated and trained in a religiously integrated environment. Although there is a fair measure of co-operation among the staff and students of the three colleges, that process has not yet gone as far as it might. If 80% of the total intake is allocated to the colleges, it is clear that two of the three institutions providing an integrated, multitechnic environment for teacher education would have to withdraw from initial teacher training provision. The arguments in favour of a multitechnic rather than a monotechnic environment for teacher education, some of which are identified in the Chilver Report (para 7.15), e.g., the enhancement of the attractiveness of teacher education as a form of professional and personal education, the undesirability of educating student teachers in a context totally removed from their peers preparing for other occupations, will ensure that the issues addressed by the Chilver Review Group but not yet resolved will remain a focus for discussion in the years ahead.

Certification

The first and perhaps most notably change that has taken place in the last thirty years has been in the qualifications required for obtaining a teacher's certificate. The goal of an all-graduate profession, which teachers have sought since the nineteenth century, has finally been attained. Although this development has been seen by some as encouraging a spurious form of professionalism, there is no doubt that it is almost universally welcomed by teachers. In most countries in which it has been achieved, the move to graduate status has been accompanied by a lengthening of the course, but, in Northern Ireland the minimum length of the initial training course has been three years since the late 1940's. Recently a working party set up by the Advisory Committee for the Supply and Training of Teachers (N.I.) has argued that to enable student teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to commence teaching in modern society, the minimum length of any initial training course leading to qualified teacher status should be four years.

The original proposal made by a Working Group (1975) convened jointly by the Universities Grants Committee (UGC) that BEd courses should be three years for a general degree and four years for honours was predicated on the assumptions that the academic year in colleges of education was longer than that in universities and that a planned and systematic year-long programme of induction was to be available for all teachers taking first appointments. Even if one grants qualified cogency to the first argument there is no doubt that the second has not been met. Despite the success of some schemes, the necessary arrangements for a comprehensive induction programme have not been made. In a recent report a Working Group in Northern Ireland established by DENI under the chairmanship of the Senior Chief Inspector to consider the place of professional studies in teacher training (DENI, 1983), some of the reasons for the failure to develop the pilot projects on induction into a scheme applicable to all teachers in their first year of work were identified. The report commends the concept of the "houseman" or "intern" year for all new teachers and the proposal is now under active discussion. The major problem will lie in finding the resources but I believe that, within the next ten years, the "houseman" concept or some similar strategy will be implemented in Northern Ireland.

One of the effects of a change to graduate status for all teachers was to hasten the change from a system of stage related qualifications to one in which all students who complete a course of teacher education, either concurrent or consecutive, are qualified to teach in primary, secondary or grammar schools. This is part of a more fundamental change which relates to the erosion of what was once a sharp distinction between primary and secondary schoolteaching and the qualifications and length of preparation required to teach in the two sectors.

More recently there has been a reaction against the idea of generic training leading to a qualification to teach in all types of schools (primary, secondary and grammar). The publication of the paper by the DES on qualified teacher status (DES, 1982a) and the unease about the effectiveness of current teacher training policies as exemplified by such publications as "the New Teacher in School" (DES, 1982b) have been important factors in bringing about the change. In addition there has been in Northern Ireland a marked shift in the balance of demand for new teachers so that for the next ten years or so, up to 75% or 80% of the demand will be from primary schools. As a result, DENI has, in 1983 for the first time, designated the intake places as either primary or secondary (1982c). The profession in general and the staffs of the colleges of education in particular are resistant to what they perceive as an over-emphasis on the phase of schooling to which courses are related. They are reluctant to accept what they see as the thin end of a wedge, the broad end being the advent of a qualification restricting the holder to teach in one type of school only. This development is seen as reintroducing the differences in the status of qualifications which had been in the process of disappearing. Any move towards a restricted licence (i.e., a licence applicable to only one level of schooling) is perceived by teachers as jeopardising the unity of the profession.

Some have claimed that the raising of the status of the initial qualification for teachers has resulted in an over-emphasis on academic studies. It is a common criticism that professional studies are neglected and as a result some teaching posts are being filled by young teachers who are not competent to carry out the tasks of teaching. Whether justified or not, these criticisms colour the views of both practising teachers and the general public. It is interesting, in the light of this, that teachers relate their standing to the status of the qualification that certifies them as teachers. In a recent research study in Northern Ireland, McEwen (1981) has confirmed this finding and has further established that the prestige gained is perceived to be related to theoretical knowledge. Teachers clearly feel that their standing as a profession is firmly connected to a qualification which achieves a demonstrable degree level standard in theoretical knowledge. However, teachers appear to be ambivalent about their role as a learned or academic profession. Professional identity is related closely to subject knowledge, although on this issue primary teachers, not unexpectedly, differ somewhat from secondary level teachers. Academic knowledge, which is seen as highly theoretical, is held to carry great prestige. Teachers appear to emphasise the skills or craft element when discussing the requirements of initial and in-service training courses, yet in relation to professionalism emphasise the importance of theoretical knowledge.

The structure and content of courses

The development of courses of initial and in-service training for teachers is clearly related to the two issues already discussed. The concern of teachers for the nature and status of the institutions which prepare entrants to the profession

and provide courses and support services to assist their own professional development, and for the standing of the qualifications granting certification to young teachers will be reflected in the structure and content of courses at all levels of training. It is not possible in a short paper to examine all the issues which now dominate discussions on course structures and content and will probably continue to be major areas of concern for the foreseeable future. The purpose is to reflect on what are currently themes of some importance and likely to remain so for some time to come. Although these issues are considered mainly in the context of concurrent courses of education and training (i.e., BEd or BA/BSc courses with education as a main subject), much of what is discussed is relevant to the consecutive mode (degree courses plus PGCE, and other models).

As has been noted, probably the main criticism of courses of initial training for teachers is that they do not prepare the students adequately for the practical realities of life in the classroom. Certainly this is the critical comment most frequently made by primary school teachers who tend to look back at the old concurrent certificate course of a quarter of a century ago as enabling them to acquire a range of useable classroom skills and methods. Some of this can be put down to a nostalgia that helps to cloud accurate recall since, as can be seen from the literature, the same criticisms were made by practising teachers of the courses then. However, a feeling now appears to exist that, between the training courses and the challenges young teachers will have to confront, there has opened up a gap which has left many of them feeling ill-equipped, frustrated and without support. The unease of teachers is reinforced by their belief that the advent of graduate status for the profession and degree courses has led to a disproportionate amount of time being given to theoretical studies with practical concerns relegated to a minor place.

The discontinuity between theory and practice is a matter of controversy with a long history in the training of teachers and a question of major significance for any course of professional preparation. There has often been tension (frequently less than creative) between the teacher trainers and the practitioners, the class teachers. Explanations for the sharp differences are generally of two kinds. The first relates to the perceived disparity of status between trainers and teachers and their differing views on teaching. Trainers are not involved in class teaching and may not have been for many years. Teachers and indeed some trainers see this as a great handicap in dealing with the practical skills required to meet the challenges of the classroom. The second reason concerns the differences between the perceptions of trainers and teachers of the relevance for the tasks of teaching of the theoretical studies done in the training institutions. Theory is considered less relevant to teaching and therefore its value more exiguous than in medicine, where anatomy is held to have a closer relationship with medical practice than, say, philosophy has with teaching. It is true that a number of questions are begged by this argument, but this is the position as perceived by most teachers and it colours

the relationship between the training institutions and the schools. These two areas, the balance of theoretical and professional studies at both pre-service and in-service levels and the links between the training institutions and the schools will probably see major developments in the next ten years. Professional studies in initial training, which will increase in significance and importance, are increasingly being perceived as only the first stage in the professional development of each teacher.

However there is a danger that, if too emphatic a dishotomy is made between theoretical and professional elements of the course much of what has been achieved in the development of theoretical studies will be lost. It is true that young teachers must acquire the well-tried, proven methods of teaching and classroom management which are practised currently by the best teachers. Having said that, it is necessary for the improvement of educational practice and the professional and personal development of the teachers that those who teach are able to reflect on and think critically about both their own work and educational issues generally. Therefore initial courses of teacher preparation should attempt to provide for prospective teachers educational and training experiences which will enable them to acquire the skills necessary to practise the craft of teaching, the capacity to apply the findings of empirical research to their work and the theoretical knowledge necessary to illuminate their understanding of teaching and learning, society, education and above all themselves.

What is implied here is that the concept of professional studies by replaced by the wider idea of professional development which not only brings together theoretical and professional studies but also emphasises the integrated nature of pre-service and in-service training. One of the results is to emphasise the important role advanced theoretical studies should play in the continued professional development of teachers. In addition, the support services available to schools to promote staff development should be seen as part of a comprehensive in-service effort focussed on the school.

The bringing together of the training institutions and the schools through their shared responsibility for the professional development of teachers is one of the ways in which close links between the two can be fostered. Another is through teaching practice which is the traditional interface between them. For a number of well-documented reasons, teaching practice can be a less than successful experience. Research shows that students think that it has great potential for helping them but frequently that potential is not realised. Many years ago Dewey pointed out that young student teachers often get contradictory advice from college tutors and teachers in the school. Students naturally imitate the methods of those teachers they perceive as successful in imparting knowledge and keeping order and therefore the skills of class management and associated skills are acquired with very little reference to educational theory. Consequently it is essential that between the training institution and the school is established a link which will facilitate

effective practice and supervision. One solution, which has often been promoted, is to require teacher trainers to return to school periodically to take up teaching posts. Another with the same objective is to permit school teachers and college lecturers to interchange posts for an extended period. The fact that this type of strategy has rarely been tried in practice testifies to the almost insuperable difficulties which is raises. An alternative possibility is the idea already mentioned of introducing a "houseman" year, the successful implementation of which would demand close and continuing liaison between schools and training institutions.

The consequence of these developments will be to make teacher education and training at all levels more professional. If the definition of "professional" includes not only the learning of the skills of teaching and classroom management and the study of research in this field but also the acquisition of the theoretical knowledge and the expertise to examine critically educational issues and problems, then this will be a positive advance.

In this short paper three themes are identified, institutional structures, certification and the structure and content of courses of education and training. These three concerns will continue to dominate discussions on teacher education in Northern Ireland for the next few years. The teacher education system in the province has over the last ten years gone through a testing and unsettled time. Although directions for the immediate future have recently become clearer, not all the problems have been resolved. What is clear is that the situation is not without exciting possibilities.

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